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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 001589

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SUBJECT: SCO: SECRETARIAT STAFF PREDICT NOT MUCH NEW AT
UP-COMING SUMMIT

BEIJING 00001589 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Acting Political Section Chief Ben Moeling.
Reasons 1.4 (B/D).

Summary

1. (C) Contrary to MFA official comments trumpeting the importance of the upcoming SCO summit in Yekaterinburg June 15-16, officials at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Secretariat in Beijing downplayed expectations for new developments at the summit in a meeting with PolOff June 12. The security situation in Afghanistan remained an important concern for member states and possible SCO involvement was under discussion. Our contacts also stated that there were no efforts planned in the near future to admit new SCO members. The officials highlighted the importance of Russian culture and language in the everyday work at the Secretariat, despite efforts to provide Chinese language instruction, adding that Central Asian diplomats at the SCO Secretariat and Beijing embassies maintained much stronger personal ties to Russia than China. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) PolOff discussed the up-coming SCO summit June 12 with two political staff members attached to the SCO Secretariat, Bolat Syrlybaev, a Kazakh national and Special Assistant to the SCO General Secretary, and Senior Expert Gulkaiyr Balbaeva, from Kyrgyzstan.

SCO Summit Goals: More of the Same

3. (C) Despite MFA comments such as those by VFM Li Hui at a June 9 media briefing that "the Yekaterinburg summit will be a success and become another grand meeting in the development history of the SCO," Balbaeva downplayed expectations for new developments at the upcoming conference, noting that, as in previous summits, the primary goal was to increase cooperation among member states in security and economic areas. Balbaeva reported that the summit was expected to produce a joint communique that was unlikely to differ significantly from previous joint statements.

Afghanistan Security a Concern, but Plans Remain Vague

4. (C) Regarding the SCO's potential role in Afghanistan, Balbaeva noted that the security situation remained the most

important area of concern for SCO members, and that member states were in discussions on a range of potential SCO assistance. When pressed for details, Balbaeva highlighted the potential role for the SCO's existing Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) in Tashkent but did not indicate there were specific plans for new initiatives.

No Plans to Admit New Members

¶15. (C) Both SCO officials reported that no plans existed to admit new members into the SCO in the short term. Syrlybaev cited the lack of a formal mechanism for admitting new members, while Balbaeva noted that the SCO needed to improve cooperation among existing members before taking on new ones.

China Not in the Driver's Seat

¶16. (C) Regarding relations between the six member states at the Secretariat, both Syrlybaev and Balbaeva replied with standard points that all members, including China and Russia, treated each other as equals because of the consensus-based nature of the SCO. When asked if China had a special role in the organization, both responded that China had not attempted to lead the organization, and "always conducted itself with the utmost respect for other member states."

SCO Culture is Russian Culture

¶17. (C) Despite the fact that Chinese and Russian are both official languages of the SCO, Syrlybaev noted that in

BEIJING 00001589 002.2 OF 002

practice Russian was the primary working language. He explained that many of the Central Asian representatives did not speak Chinese, while the Chinese representatives invariably spoke fluent Russian. Syrlybaev noted that, when the SCO was founded five years ago, the Secretariat attempted to improve Chinese language capabilities by offering free Chinese classes during working hours, but later discontinued the program due to a lack of interest. He added that Central Asian representatives at the SCO and Central Asian EmbOffs in Beijing retained much closer personal ties to the Russians than the Chinese, including through frequent social gatherings for CIS countries at the Russian Embassy, as well as through the Russian Embassy School, which the children of most Central Asian diplomats attend.

Make-up of Shanghai Cooperation Organization

¶18. (C) According to the SCO officials, representation at the SCO Secretariat was based on the member state's financial contributions to the organization. China and Russia both have seven representatives at the Secretariat, Kazakhstan has five, and Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan each have two or three representatives.

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